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1ST QUARTER GOLD IMPORTS JUST 6% OF LAST YEAR'S Q1

India imported gold worth $688 million (₹5,160 crore) in Q1 against $11.5 billion (₹86,250 cr) in the same period last year

SILVER IMPORTS, TOO, DROP SIGNIFICANTLY

Silver imports during the April-June 2020 quarter, too, fell 45% on a year-on-year basis to $575 million. The decline in gold and silver imports has helped in narrowing the country's trade deficit to $9.12 billion during the April-June 2020 quarter against $45.96 billion a year ago. Gold imports are important as they have a bearing on the current account deficit

CURRENT ACCOUNT TURNS SURPLUS

- Thanks to narrowing trade deficit, India recorded a current account surplus of $0.6 bn or 0.1% of GDP for the January-March quarter against a deficit of $4.6 bn or 0.7% of GDP in a year ago
- Gold imports have been recording -ve growth since December last year but demand fell drastically in the wake of Covid-19

72%

DECLINE IN GEMS AND JEWELLERY EXPORTS IN APRIL-JUNE 2020

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TRICHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

₹15.5L cr loss to retail industry so far, says CAIT

No improvement even after 45 days of Unlock 1.0; Seeks relief package from govt

SESA SEN @New Delhi

BACK-to-back lockdowns due to the Covid-19 pandemic have forced many retail businesses to down shutters and nearly 1.5 crore traders are on the verge of doing so in the absence of any support from the government, said the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT).

"Covid-19 has caused a huge dent in retail trade with losses crossing ₹15.5 lakh crore in the past 100 days. Even after 45 days from Unlock-1, there has been no clear-cut improvement," said Praveen Khandelwal, secretary general of CAIT, which represents around seven crore traders and 40,000 trade associations.

CAIT urged the government to award a package to traders to ensure their survival. The traders' body demanded relaxation in payment of taxes, extension in repayment of bank loans without additional interest or penalty, and measures that will provide money directly in the hands of the traders.

In April, the losses stood at about ₹5 lakh crore and ₹4 lakh crore each in May and June. The losses stood at about ₹2.5 lakh crore in the first fortnight of July, offering a grim snapshot of the effect of the pandemic on consumer spending.

"Even as the lockdown was relaxed, store footfall was only 10%. Most traders do not have deep pockets. Plus, they have several financial obligations to meet," Khandelwal said.

Retailers have also pointed out that their working capital has completely dried up leaving them even more vulnerable. Payment for goods supplied between December and March to customers on credit has been delayed due to lockdown restrictions. They are hopeful the payments will start trickling in from September.

"The rule of economics describes such a situation, when input is low and the output is high, as unhealthy business eating capital. A helping hand from the government is much needed," CAIT said.

10%

The retail sector's contribution to India's gross domestic product

NEGATIVE OUTLOOK

Recently, credit rating agency CARE Ratings gave India's retail sector a 'negative' outlook saying the impact on demand due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic is expected to remain muted at least for the next three to four quarters

Absolute majority in Raj assembly: Cong

New Delhi: The Congress has absolute majority in the Rajasthan Assembly, the party asserted on Sunday, "BJP leaders now are not demanding President's rule", Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said.

Gehlot weighing options, may seek trust vote

RICHA SHARMA @New Delhi

WITH the Rajasthan High Court bench slated to resume hearing on a petition filed rebel Congress lawmakers against a batch of disqualification notices slapped on them by Speaker C P Joshi, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot is learnt to be weighing options to call a short Assembly session if the court rules against the notices.

According to party sources, Gehlot is looking at all options on the table, including legal, in the event of an adverse verdict. "The Rajasthan government will call an Assembly session and the Congress will issue whip to all MLAs to attend. If Sachin Pilot and his group of MLAs defy, they will be disqualified. Even if they attend but vote against or abstain when Gehlot seeks a confidence vote, they will get disqualified," said sources.

The assumption is Gehlot will sail through during the floor test even without the votes of rebels. After having stated last week that he has the support of 102 lawmakers, including allies and Independents but excluding rebels, the crafty chief minister roped in the two-member Bharatiya Tribal Party on Sunday, increasing his comfort level. The simple majority mark in the 200-member House is 101. The whip is meant to stamp out rebellion one way or the other.

The court had on Friday deferred hearing till Monday and directed the Speaker not to take any action in the matter till Tuesday. The Speaker's notice was based on a disqualification petition sent to him by the party's Chief Whip under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution.

Meanwhile, there has been no direct communication between Pilot and the party's top leadership but intermediaries are still in play.

"The central leadership wants him to stay but he is sticking to his demand to be named the chief minister while the majority of the MLAs are with Gehlot," said a party leader.

However, unlike Jyotiraditya Scindia, Pilot has not said anything against the party or its top leadership. Last week, Gehlot sacked him as deputy CM and state party unit chief. P7

As Mysuru stayed indoors for the Sunday lockdown, a girl makes time to feed pigeons near Mysuru Palace | UDAYSHANKAR S

CM not in favour, but some mantris, health experts for longer lockdown

ANUSHA RAVI @ Bengaluru

WITH the weeklong lockdown in Bengaluru Urban and Rural districts set to be lifted on July 22, the key question on everybody's mind is whether it will be extended by another week or not.

While Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa has been quite categorical on not extending the lockdown, health department officials, at least two key ministers and all medical experts have suggested that it be extended by at least another week to complete the 14-day cycle of breaking the chain. Interestingly, the ministers in charge of the eight BBMP zones in Bengaluru are all for lifting of the lockdown completely, starting Wednesday.

"There will be no further lockdown, only lifting it. People's daily lives will be affected if it is extended, not just the government's affairs. The Chief Minister is also categorical about it," stressed Deputy Chief Minister Dr C N Ashwathnarayana.

The feeling, however, is not unanimous. Sources from the review meeting which Chief Minister Yediyurappa held on Friday said that ministers who have been seeking expert opinion frequently — like Health Minister B Sriramulu and Medical Education Minister Dr K Sudhakar — had proposed extending the lockdown by another week, based on experts' suggestions. This was also backed by the Health Department.

"It was conveyed to the CM that global trend suggests a lockdown should be implemented for 14 days to break the chain. He was also apprised that it will also give ward committees time to conduct door-to-door surveys. One week's lockdown would be futile with no real results," said the source, recalling suggestions made to the CM by the group lobbying for extension of the lockdown. P5

Safety is priority, no plan to reopen schools now

PEARL MARIA D'SOUZA @ Bengaluru

REFUTING claims that the government had decided to reopen schools in September, Minister for Primary and Secondary Education S Suresh Kumar on Sunday cleared the air, saying these did not reflect the government's views, and that schools would be reopened only after making the atmosphere conducive and safe for students.

Kumar on Sunday said the government was yet to take a decision on reopening schools, and that opinions expressed by officials during a meeting were being misconstrued as the final word.

During a video conference with Central officials on July 15 on 'School Safety Plan', where representatives of the state government and Union territories expressed their views on reopening schools, the state education department had remarked that schools will reopen after September 1.

Karnataka was among half the states and Union territories in India which had given an estimated date of reopening to the Ministry of Human Resources & Development (MHRD). Several regions are still awaiting the MHRD and Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) guidelines.

Among the South Indian states, Kerala too had proposed to open schools after August 31, while Andhra Pradesh gave a tentative date of September 5. However, Tamil Nadu and Telangana had remained undecided.

Of the high-incidence regions, Gujarat and Maharashtra remained undecided, while Delhi was looking to reopen schools in August.

"The government's priority on education during the Covid-19 situation is not the same as usual. Before we reopen schools, we need to ensure the atmosphere is conducive for students. So far, we haven't decided on reopening schools. Students and their parents need not panic," Suresh Kumar said.

Before we reopen schools, we need to ensure the atmosphere is conducive for students. Students and their parents need not panic

S Suresh Kumar, Primary and Secondary Education

STRONG MEASURES READY

Although unsure about the start of the new academic year, Suresh Kumar had earlier told *TNIE* that the department was ready with strong pedagogical measures so that no student is devoid of education even during these times.

91 FATALITIES ON SUNDAY

Teams of senior officials have been deputed to monitor if private medical institutions are reserving beds for Covid patients

KARNATAKA COVID-19 BATTLE

4,120 Positive cases reported across the state on Sunday

2,156 +ve Cases reported in Bengaluru, again the highest in the state

REPORTS: P4

SECOND CASE OF FIRING BY NEPAL POLICE, INDIAN HURT

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @Patna

A 25-year-old Indian national was shot in the shoulder by the Nepal Armed Border Force on Saturday evening near the Indo-Nepal border in Bihar's Kishanganj district. The injured youth, identified as Jitendra Kumar Singh, was searching for his cattle along with two other villagers when he was shot. According to sources, the youth went 300 metres into a no-man's land inside the Nepal side of border by mistake. This is the second incident of firing by Nepal forces in recent times. On June 12, an Indian national was killed in Sitamarhi district in Bihar when he was seen sitting near a no-man's land.

Call to incentivise *desi* APIs to reduce China dependence

RICHA SHARMA @New Delhi

TO reduce dependence on China for Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API), a report of the Ministry of Science and Technology has recommended a slew of measures, including a re-look at Custom Duty, to facilitate indigenous production. At present, India's pharma sector imports a whopping 68% of its API requirement from China.

Companies using indigenous API must get preference in government procurement, the report suggests while seeking priority licence renewal for API manufacturers. It also recommends relaxation in environment clearances and land acquisition for them.

"India has been manufacturing bulk of APIs till about two decades back... Given the changes in global norms, we quickly need to ensure API security in the country and prepare a national stockpile of generic medicines for critical illness," the report says.

In 2019, India imported ₹249 billion worth of intermediates and APIs, of which around ₹169 billion was from China. A total of 600 types of molecules of APIs and Drug Intermediates are imported, of which 58 molecules are sourced only from China.

India has the technology but needs to optimise cost by scaling up manufacturing of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients.

Towards this end, common facilities such as solvent recovery plants, distillation plants, power and steam units should be established in bulk drug parks, it suggests.

EXPRESS READ

Gold smuggling kingpin picked up by Dubai cops

Kochi: Faisal Fareed, the prime accused in the smuggling of gold through diplomatic baggage, has been detained in Dubai. He was picked up from his house on Friday and is being grilled by the police. P5

Saba Karim asked 'to resign' from BCCI

New Delhi: Former India wicket-keeper Saba Karim has been asked to resign as BCCI General Manager - Cricket Operations. It is learnt that the Board was not satisfied with Karim's planning for domestic cricket. P11

Man held for posting fake hospital video

Bengaluru: Police nabbed a man for posting a fake video, purportedly of a dedicated Covid-19 ward in Victoria Hospital, Bengaluru, on social media. Sameer Ullah was caught just after he posted the video. P3

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TOYING WITH IDEAS

Forget 'Chinapatna' toys, time to revive Channapatna beauties

S LALITHA @Bengaluru

CHINA or Channa? There has been a chorus for the boycott of Chinese toys and reviving the Channapatna toy industry. The standoff with China has now come as a blessing in disguise for these toys. For, it offers a big chance for bringing back the glory of the Channapatna toy industry.

Channapatna, known as the toy town of Karnataka, was seen floundering with its markets flooded with cheaper 'Made in China' products and livelihoods threatened till recently.

Federation of Karnataka Chamber of Commerce and Industry president C R Janardhana said the positive aspect of this crisis could be the revival of the Channapatna toys at a global level. "The Chief Minister has already called for the toy industry here to be upgraded by incorporating electronic and digital elements into it. They are eco-friendly too. It will take some time but Channapatna could emerge as a global toy supplier," he said.

But for Bengaluru's toy industry, there seems to be little hope as of now. With 70 per cent of the much sought after modern toys imported from China, toy shops are surviving on whatever stocks have been imported in the past.

Three events this year created an unprecedented crisis for the industry. The supply disruption caused by the outbreak of the novel coronavirus in China, the increase of import duty by the Centre by 200% in February from 20% to 60% and the need to go in for double quality certification for imports to be implemented from September this year. The latest jolt for the industry is the strained relations between the two countries due to the military standoff and the subsequent campaign across the country to boycott Chinese brands.

There are an estimated 700 to 800 small toy shops and 200 to 300 large shops in Bengaluru, according to the Karnataka Toys Association. P5

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C R Janardhana, president, FKCCI

Channapatna toys are unique in that they are made exclusively of wood | EXPRESS